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U.S. Army Retreats, Allows Prostitutes on Vietnam Base

QUINHON, South Vietnam, Jan. 23 (UPI)—The U.S. Army, which four months ago built a wall around its base at Camranh Bay to keep out prostitutes and drug pushers, now is permitting ladies of the evening to be signed onto its bases officially in central Vietnam to meet American troops in their barracks.

Officers acknowledge that there is a considerable security risk involved, since the only requirement for admitting the girls is that they show a Vietnamese identity card—a document that any undercover Viet Cong agent can obtain without difficulty.

They also acknowledge that, despite precautions, some of the girls are smuggling drugs onto the bases. But they maintain that the risks are worthwhile in the interests of keeping the peace within an increasingly disgruntled and demoralized army here.

The girls, wearing the same mod clothes they wore when they worked in the mostly boarded-up bar district of downtown Quinhon, cluster nightly at the gates of major bases in this area.

Attracting Attention

Soliciting business from soldiers who wander out to the gates after dinner, they parade up and down along the

dimly lit, dusty, barbed-wire perimeters trying to attract attention as best they can.

Often as many as 50 to 60 girls can be seen at one time clustered at the gates of Quincy Compound, headquarters of the Quinhon Support Command, which controls the flow of all U.S. supplies to the critical Central Highlands. Other smaller bases in the area, such as Phutai and Lane Army Airfield, 10 miles northwest of here, also attract flocks of Vietnamese prostitutes.

The GIs, who have been forbidden for more than a year to go into local towns except on official business, come to the gates after dinner and pick girls from the crowd. Then they sign the girls onto the bases in official rosters maintained by the gate guards. They are thus considered "local national guests."

At one base, a special shack has been built near the gate, and girls are taken into it and searched for drugs before being permitted onto the compound. Any girl caught carrying narcotics is forced to surrender her identity card to the guards and is supposed to be permanently barred from the base.

The security risk arises from the fact that, once the

girls are on base, they are permitted to move about freely with their escorts.

They can frequently be seen with American soldiers going to recreation centers, non-commissioned and commissioned officers' clubs, movies, barracks areas or wandering about in darkened business areas. Most barracks here have private or semi-private rooms, and the girls often stay overnight.

Although they are barred from command posts and other restricted areas, it is no secret that they do sometimes visit guard bunkers and perimeter towers.

Officers acknowledge that a trained spy could easily make mental—or written—notes about the location and condition of defense positions numbers and positions of fighting machines, the general state of readiness for ground attack, and the mission of a base and how well it was being carried out.

U.S. Army headquarters spokesmen confirmed today that a new visitors policy directive had been issued recently, and said it was applicable to bases all over Vietnam. They were not immediately able to give its date and contents, however.